

IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA
UPPER MISSOURI DIVISION
WILLOW CREEK BASIN (41N)
PRELIMINARY DECREE

CLAIMANT: State of Montana Board of Land Commissioners

CASE: 41N-0207-R-2022
41N 21787-00

NOTICE OF FILING OF MASTER'S REPORT

This Master's Report was filed with the Montana Water Court on the above stamped date. Please review this report carefully.

You may file a written objection to this Master's Report within **10 days** of the stamped date if you disagree or find errors with the Master's findings of fact, conclusions of law, or recommendations. Rule 23, W.R.Adj.R. If the Master's Report was mailed to you, the Montana Rules of Civil Procedure allow an additional 3 days be added to the 10-day objection period. Rule 6(d), M.R.Civ.P. If you file an objection, you must serve a copy of the objection to all parties on the service list found at the end of the Master's Report. The original objection and a certificate of mailing to all parties on the service list must be filed with the Water Court.

If you do not file a timely objection, the Water Court will conclude that you agree with the content of this Master's Report.

MASTER'S REPORT

All water right claims that appeared in the Preliminary Decree for Willow Creek (Basin 41N) were subject to "issue remarks" resulting from pre-decree examination by the DNRC, objections, and counterobjections.

Claim 41N 21787-00 was consolidated into Case 41N-0207-R-2022 to resolve the issue remarks.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Claim 41N 21787-00 appeared with the following substantive issue remarks:

AN AMENDMENT WAS SUBMITTED ON 1/10/2018 REQUESTING TO AMEND THE PLACE OF USE. THE AMENDMENT WAS NOT PROCESSED. THE AMENDMENT WILL BE REVIEWED BY THE COURT AFTER THE ISSUANCE OF THE PRELIMINARY DECREE.

THE PLACE OF USE APPEARS TO NEED MODIFICATION BASED ON THE DNRC CORRECTION TO THE POINT OF DIVERSION. THE CORRECT PLACE OF USE LEGAL LAND DESCRIPTION APPEARS TO BE THE NENESE SEC 16 TWP 33N RGE 4E LIBERTY COUNTY.

2. On September 7, 2022, the Court consolidated the claim and set a filing deadline for the Claimants to respond with any additional information necessary to resolve the issue remarks.

3. On September 23, 2022, Claimant State of Montana Board of Land Commissioners filed a *Response*. The *Response* states that the information in the claim file was complete and sufficient to resolve the issue remark and that the modification proposed in the above-listed issue remark was correct.

4. Claim 41N 21787-00 also received a notice-type issue remark from the DNRC during its claims reexamination. No Objections were filed.

PRINCIPLES OF LAW

1. A properly filed Statement of Claim for an existing water right is prima facie proof of its content. Section 85-2-227, MCA; Rule 10, W.R.Adj.R.

2. Prima facie proof may be contradicted and overcome by a preponderance of the evidence. Rule 19, W.R.Adj.R.

3. A preponderance of the evidence is evidence that shows a fact is “more probable than not.” *Hohenlohe v. State*, 2010 MT 203, ¶ 33, 357 Mont. 438, 240 P.3d 628.

4. If prima facie status is overcome, the burden shifts back to the claimant to demonstrate historical use. *79 Ranch v. Pitsch*, 204 Mont. 426, 432-33, 666 P.2d 215, 218 (1983).

5. Section 85-2-248(2), MCA, requires that the Water Court resolve all issue remarks that are not resolved through the objection process. *See also* Rule 7, W.R.Adj.R.

6. The Water Court may use information submitted by the DNRC, the Statement of Claim, and any other data obtained by the Court to evaluate a water right. Sections 85-2-227, -231(2), MCA.

7. When resolving issue remarks, the Water Court must weigh the information resulting in the issue remark and the issue remark against the claimed water right. Section 85-2-247(2), MCA. The factual evidence on which an issue remark is based must meet the preponderance of evidence standard before the prima facie status of a claim is overcome. 43Q 200996-00 et al., Order Establishing Volume and Order Closing Case, at 18, June 8, 2015.

8. If a claimant fails to comply with an order issued by the Water Court, the Court may issue orders of sanction that are just. Rule 22, W.R.Adj.R.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The information in the record is sufficient to resolve the above-listed issue remarks appearing on the claim. Based on the information contained in the Claimant’s *Response*, the place of use element for claim 41N 21787-00 should be modified as described in Finding of Fact No. 1. This modification resolves the issue remarks, and the issue remarks should be removed from the claim.

2. The notice-type issue remark appearing on claim 41N 21787-00 served its notice purpose and should be removed from the claim.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, this Master recommends that the Court adopt the changes as outlined above.

A post decree abstract of the water right claim reflecting the recommended changes is attached to this Report.

ELECTRONICALLY SIGNED AND DATED BELOW.

Service Via Electronic Mail:

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POST DECREE
ABSTRACT OF WATER RIGHT CLAIM
WILLOW CREEK
BASIN 41N

Water Right Number: 41N 21787-00 STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Version: 3 -- POST DECREE

Status: ACTIVE

Owners: MONTANA STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS
TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MT 59620 1601

Priority Date: APRIL 15, 1949

Type of Historical Right: USE

Purpose (use): STOCK

Flow Rate: A SPECIFIC FLOW RATE HAS NOT BEEN DECREED FOR THIS USE FROM THIS ONSTREAM RESERVOIR. THE FLOW RATE IS LIMITED TO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT HISTORICALLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN THIS PURPOSE.

Volume: THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE AMOUNT OF WATER CONSUMPTIVELY USED FOR STOCK WATERING PURPOSES AT THE RATE OF 30 GALLONS PER DAY PER ANIMAL UNIT. ANIMAL UNITS SHALL BE BASED ON REASONABLE CARRYING CAPACITY AND HISTORICAL USE OF THE AREA SERVICED BY THIS WATER SOURCE.

Source Name: UNNAMED TRIBUTARY OF EAGLE CREEK

Source Type: SURFACE WATER

THE SOURCE IS A TRIBUTARY OF A NATURAL SINK.

Point of Diversion and Means of Diversion:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1		NENESE	16	33N	4E	LIBERTY

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: DAM

THE PERIOD OF DIVERSION HAS BEEN STANDARDIZED BY DNRC FOR THIS CLAIM.

Reservoir: ONSTREAM

<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
	NENESE	16	33N	4E	LIBERTY

Diversion to Reservoir: DIVERSION # 1

Period of Use: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Place of Use:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1			NENESE	16	33N	4E	LIBERTY